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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3666  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1484  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1351  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1920  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2439  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000507

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: RFE REPORTER GYLYCHDURDIYEV'S  
TEN-YEAR OLD BEEF WITH GOVERNMENT PROBABLE CAUSE OF  
HARASSMENT

REF: ASHGABAT 0501

Classified By: Charge Sylvia R. Curran for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Although Halmurat Gylychdurdiyev is a longtime reporter for RFE/RL, he also has a more than ten year-old bone to pick with Turkmenistan's government. His ongoing fight over a financial dispute in the 1990s is a contributing factor why authorities put pressure on him and his family (reftel). At a time when the authorities are warily viewing signs of popular discontent to new economic reforms, their long history with Gylychdurdiyev and his deliberate defiance stand as red flags. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) RFE/RL reporter Halmurat Gylychdurdiyev recently shared with PolOff his personal reasons for wanting to challenge the Turkmen government through his critical reporting that has long been a staple on Radio Azatlyk, the Turkmen-language broadcast that RFE transmits into the region. Gylychdurdiyev, now in his late 60's, was born and raised here and was a respected director of documentary films during the Soviet period. In the late 1990s, he had finished shooting material for a new documentary on Turkmenistan, and needed to send the film to Moscow to be developed. Turkmenistan had no film development laboratory of its own.

AN UNCOMPLETED TRANSACTION LEADS TO FORECLOSURE

¶3. (C) Gylychdurdiyev needed to send the film to Moscow quickly, along with payment worth about \$6,500 for the work, and turned to a local bank to assist with conversion of this money to rubles that would be wired to a bank in Moscow. Somehow, the payment was never made, and the Turkmen bank was unable to return Gylychdurdiyev's money to him. The loss of the money invested in the documentary led to the closure of the small filmmaking enterprise he and some partners had established after Turkmenistan's independence. When he could get no satisfaction from bank officials regarding the whereabouts of his money, he sent letters to the Procurator General's office. Officials there said they would send his case to the Supreme Court for review, but later the court told Gylychdurdiyev it had no information on his case and

could not address it. Representatives of the Supreme Court and of the Procurator General's office were unsympathetic to his persistent requests for assistance, and told him he would need to spend 20 million manat in order to pursue his complaint. The case has never been addressed in court.

14. (C) His film, which remained in Ashgabat, went undeveloped for too long, and was permanently ruined. Even today, Gylychdurdiyev continues to harbor a desire to sue the Cabinet of Ministers for the role they played in causing the bureaucratic tangle that led to the loss of his film and his money.

...AND TO A PERMANENT GRUDGE

15. (C) Gylychdurdiyev said this experience demonstrated to him that this is not an honorable or functional government that would ever serve its people. He felt that it would only do things that would directly benefit those who served within it. Citing as an example of what he opposes, Gylychdurdiyev noted that in April 2007, just two months after entering office, President Berdimuhamedov bestowed on himself the "Watan" medal. The award comes with a \$20,000 check and confers the title of "Doctor of Sciences" upon the recipient. Gylychdurdiyev questioned why the president would confer the national award on himself, denying it to some more deserving recipient who could use the money. This, he said, was an example of a leader taking care of himself first.

...WHICH BECOMES A LONG-RUNNING "WAR"

16. (C) Gylychdurdiyev told us that it was not long after

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his financial loss that he turned to reporting for RFE/RL as a way to put the heat on a government he neither trusts nor respects. Over the years, both he and the authorities who harass him and his family have become entrenched in what he calls a war, and his critical economic reporting provides constant fuel for the fire. Both sides appear to be bent on making life difficult for the other.

17. (C) COMMENT: Government authorities do not harass Gylychdurdiyev simply because he is an independent reporter. They harass him because he has a history of challenging authority, and they view him as a constant irritant. At a time when the authorities are warily viewing signs of popular discontent to new economic reforms, their long history with Gylychdurdiyev and his deliberate defiance stand as red flags. END COMMENT.  
CURRAN